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SECURITY INFORMATION

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Auth CS, USAFD/I. USAF PROPOSED CHANGES TO NIE-78: ESTIMATE OF
LIKELIHOOD OF GENERAL WAR WITHIN THE NEXT
DECADET.S. CONT. # EP
D.I. HQ USAF DEC 11 1954

I PROJECTION OF PRESENT TRENDS

The World Power Situation

1. Although we do not consider global general war inevitable within the next decade we believe that the world situation is such that the odds are greater than even that global war will come within the next decade the risk of major war will continue to be great. The cold war will soon enter its eighth year. The armaments race is intense well underway. Ideological differences and the Iron Curtain prevent both normal diplomatic negotiation between the governments, and contact between the peoples, of the Bloc and the West. Although there is widespread fear of the consequences of a war fought with new weapons, this fear alone is unlikely to prevent the coming of war.

2. The existing hostility, including certain acts of warfare, already exists between the Soviet Bloc and the Western nations headed by the US and will almost certainly continue. The Kremlin will continue to pursue its objective of a Communist world dominated from Moscow. The rulers of the USSR assert that capitalism and communism cannot continue to co-exist indefinitely. The Communists accept the possibility of periods of stalemate. From time to time, as a tactical maneuver, they may bring about a temporary relaxation of tensions. They do not accept the possibility of a general settlement with the West.

3. The struggle between the Soviet Bloc and the West is now in a period of stalemate in which only a few peripheral issues are being contested with military force. Neither side appears confident of possessing a sufficient preponderance to warrant an attempt to settle fundamental issues by force. Each side will attempt during the next decade to clear in its goals and ruthless in its methods, the Soviet Bloc

Document No. 36156
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Authority DDI 104
Date 2/2/87
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possesses well-known advantages in this struggle. It also possesses certain weaknesses, among which are the difficulties of managing so vast a system from the top and the rigidity which results from the concentration of power. However, we believe that, during the period of this estimate:

- a. The European satellites will remain firmly under the control of the USSR.
- b. The Chinese Communists will develop a Soviet-type state and society, and will continue to work in close accord with the USSR.
- c. The Bloc economy will expand. It will be able simultaneously to support further capital expansion, increased military production, and increased production of consumers' goods.
- d. The Bloc will acquire a stockpile of atomic, and probably possibly thermonuclear, weapons more than sufficient, if delivered on the proper targets, to destroy the war-making potential of the West.
- e. The USSR will greatly improve its present-capacity means for delivering these weapons.
- f. The USSR will greatly improve its means for defenses against air attack by aircraft.
- g. The Bloc will maintain at least the present level of conventional armaments.
- h. The Bloc will continue to contest certain issues with force.

5. The A fundamental strength tenet of the West is its belief in the right of all peoples freely to develop their own cultures and aspirations. ~~free-of-outside-interference.~~ This very fact makes the West subject to division and renders difficult the effective operation of a coalition except

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in times of great ~~mutual~~ common danger. During this period, ~~unless there is~~
~~grave threat of general war~~; the energies of the West will may not be directed
toward an increase in military power to the same degree as in the Soviet Bloc,
unless the grave threat of general war sustains this sense of common danger.
However, if the principal Western countries maintain the present direction of
their policy and pursue that policy with skill and resolution, we believe that:

- a. No additional territory will come under Communist control.
- b. Internal security, morale and anti-Communist sentiment on the whole
will improve both within the Western coalition and within those states not allied
with either Bloc. Some of the latter may enter into closer relations or even
alliance, with the West.
- c. Production and productive capacity in the West will increase, but
perhaps at a slower percentage rate than in the Soviet Bloc but probably at a
pace which will widen the actual difference in output. Nevertheless, The West
will retain absolute superiority over the Bloc in these respects.
- d. The Western powers will maintain and expand their stockpile of atomic,
and probably thermonuclear weapons to keep it at a size more than sufficient, if
delivered on proper targets, to destroy the war-making potential of the Soviet Bloc.
- e. The West will greatly improve its means for delivering these weapons.
- f. The West will greatly improve its means for defense against attack by
aircraft.
- g. The armed forces of the West will markedly increase, especially within
the NATO alliance.

6. The developments noted in the preceding two paragraphs may not occur. In
any event they admit of great variation. Actions taken on one side will influence
those on the other. The element of will and the element of the unexpected
can always alter the course of events. If, however, these developments

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do occur, the power situation as between the two hostile camps probably will be as follows:

a. Each will have rectified the most obvious present deficiencies in its military power. The USSR will have greatly increased its capabilities in the atomic and possibly in the thermonuclear field relative to the US. The US will have improved its defensive position at home and it will have improved the capability of its allies to forestall or counter the Soviet capability for acquiring power and influence through local military or political warfare operations.

b. The Soviet Bloc will have moved much closer to the West in economic war potential, but will remain markedly inferior in overall industrial output. ~~power, and will have reduced its vulnerability to US strategic air power.~~

c. The Western powers will have improved their ~~conventional--~~ military strength position, and, by combining that with greater political understanding, will have offset in part the principal elements in the present strength of the Soviet Bloc.

d. As a consequence, barring major technological surprise on either side, such as might possibly occur in the field of guided missiles, the present stalemate, based upon the fact that situation in which neither side is confident of possessing a clear preponderance of power, will continue fundamentally unchanged.

Likelihood of Global-General War.

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7. The likelihood of general war as analyzed in this estimate is intended to mean the likelihood of expansion of the issues contested with military force to put at issue fundamental state strengths. This can occur through ~~Global war can arise~~ by the deliberate intention of either side or through a series of actions and counteractions which neither side intended to develop into global war have this result.

8. We believe that, if the above-mentioned trends operate during this period and thus prevent either side from achieving a clear preponderance of power, neither side is likely deliberately to ~~launch global war~~ effect this expansion.

9. The likelihood of ~~global-general~~ war within the next ten years thus arises mainly from the ~~probability~~ possibility that situations of tension will develop into ~~global-general~~ war. Korea, Indochina, Berlin and Iran are situations of tension existing at present. Others will probably arise.

10. As each side overcomes its most conspicuous vulnerabilities and approaches the peak of peacetime readiness for war, it will probably grow more impatient of the long indeterminateness of the contest and more apprehensive of the other's immediate intentions. In such a situation, each side will probably grow less cautious and less reluctant to accept ~~grave risks of global war~~ submit progressively more fundamental issues to decision by force.

(Original Para. 10 omitted as proposed in CIA amendments of 4 December 1952)

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PART II

POSSIBLE NEW DEVELOPMENTS

11. The foregoing paragraphs may have approached the problem by projecting in a most general way presently discernible trends. However, it is likely that the course of events during the period of this estimate will be largely determined by events at present unforeseeable or by trends which though perceptible now appear of subordinate importance. The following paragraphs will consider some of these events and trends.

Major Alterations in the World Power Situation

12. It is impossible to estimate whether either side will acquire a clear preponderance of military, economic and political strength. It seems probable that the present plans of the Soviet Bloc to increase its strategic stature by expansion of its industrial base will be carried to success. The death of Stalin may ~~interrupt this development~~ prove of major significance. It is even possible that Communism may lose its crusading zeal and be content to accept a continuation of the Status quo. Following Stalin's death, however, a younger group might come to power inclined to more aggressive preparation for war than Stalin himself would be. It would not be safe, ^{therefore} ~~however,~~ to expect that the development of Bloc strength will be halted or even slowed during the next decade.

13. On the other hand, the development of Western strength is ~~likely to~~ may be uneven at best, and could be halted ~~interrupted~~ by economic depression, division among the Western powers, or the unwillingness of the Western democracies to continue to accept the burden of the cold war. There is ~~evidence~~ reason to believe that the Kremlin not only expected the development of Western strength to be halted but also expects that divisions in the West will result in a decisive shift in the world power situation in the favor of the Bloc. The Soviet leaders will undoubtedly adopt a variety of tactical maneuvers to retard the development of Western strength and to promote

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war to proposals designed to relax tension between the East and the West.

14. If the Soviet Bloc should acquire a clear preponderance of power, through sudden technological advance or general improvement in strategic stature or major shifts in power alignments, it would probably be more disposed to accept greater risks of global war put its fundamental strengths and objectives to the test of military force than under the present situation of uncertainty. It might even deliberately precipitate global general war.

15. It is doubtful however, that Soviet courses of action can be estimated so logically. On the one hand, the Soviet leaders are demonstrably cautious. Their doctrine warns against embarking upon large military adventures without virtual certainty of victory. They appear to believe that the West will inevitably weaken and decay. They probably would not regard any stabilization in the West as permanent. In short, whatever the power situation, these considerations may act as deterrents to the deliberate initiation of global general war unless the Kremlin leaders believed that (a) the danger to them the Soviet power base was immediate and unavoidable, or (b) that their victory would be swift and complete.

16. On the other hand, the Soviet leaders are also demonstrably suspicious of the West. They profess to believe that the West will attack them in a final desperate effort to save the capitalist system. They may misinterpret Western actions. They might precipitate global general war because they believed that a Western attack impended and was unavoidable when such was not in fact the case.

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Possible New Alignments Within or Outside the Major Coalitions.

17. It is ~~not-likely~~ highly improbable that any strong new power centers capable of significantly altering the nature of the world power situation will develop during this period. However, India aspires to form such a center, and it is possible that by the end of the period under review an Arab-Asian bloc might play a significant political role in the East-West struggle, but could hardly be expected to achieve a military or economic stature sufficient to serve as a balancing force.

18. ~~Not-are-there-indications~~ It is not expected that Communist China and the USSR will develop sufficient divergences of interest to weaken the Far Eastern strength of the Soviet Bloc. Again, however, the possibility of a break between the two major Communist powers must be recognized. If it did occur, it would profoundly-materially alter the world power situation.

19. ~~21.~~ As Japanese national power revives, Japan may attempt to establish a balance of power in East Asia by playing off the US, the USSR and Communist China against each other. A break between the Soviet Union and Communist China would enhance markedly Japanese prospects for expanding its power position in Southeast Asia and developing trade relations with China.

20. ~~22.~~ It is ~~more-likely~~ considered possible that powers now within or associated with the Western coalition will so alter their orientation, domestically and externally, as to alter the world power situation. Continued economic deterioration in the United Kingdom conceivably could result in disaster and the assumption of power by radical

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elements with an anti-US orientation. It is unlikely, but possible, that economic conditions and public order and morale in France or Italy will decline to a point where Communist or ultra-nationalistic elements would come to power. In such a contingency Should any of these situations develop the North Atlantic system would be fundamentally weakened, if not destroyed.

21. 20. West Germany might attain such stature over the next decade as to permit it, under nationalistic leadership, to strive for German unification and the recovery of lost German territories by force of arms. Under such leadership, a resurgent West Germany might create destructive conflicts within the North Atlantic Alliance and might also increase the danger of global general war.

22. At the opposite end of the scale, it is conceivable though quite unlikely that Western Europe might be able to achieve such a unity and cohesiveness before the end of the decade that it could begin to assume the role of a third power bloc looking out primarily for its own interests but also capable of functioning as a buffer between the USSR and North America.

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PART III

CONSIDERATIONS OF TIMING

23. 22 If war comes the present state of hostilities expands to general war during this decade we believe it will come, not according to a deliberate plan now in existence but out of situations of tension, out of unexpected shifts in the power situation, out of errors in judgment, or out of misinterpretations by one side of the actions of the other. The danger that general war may come develop in this way is great and will remain great throughout the decade. There is no one time as against any other in which the danger of this type of development can now be said to be the greatest.

24. Despite the many uncertainties, however, any forecast of the situation during the next decade can emphasize two things:

First, the condition of Soviet economy and Soviet armed forces appears to be such that the Soviet Union can undertake majority military moves against the Western Powers at any time, perhaps with little warning.

Second, the Kremlin leadership has given every indication that its goal, however and whenever achieved, is that of world domination, but that Soviet policy in pursuit of this goal will be primarily designed to preserve the Communist power base.

25. Consequently, the Soviets may use their armed forces merely to pose a constant menace to the West while they concentrate on seeking their successes through economic unrest and political maneuvers. They may sponsor or wage a series of localized military operations in separate areas of the world, calculating that such actions will not expose the Communist power base to attack. They may consider that they can condition the West to respond continually to localized situations with localized programs. They may even estimate that the threat of an atomic attack against certain nations of Western Europe would be sufficient

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to bring about their capitulation, enable rapid Soviet occupation and confront the United States with a war task of such proportions as to discourage its being attempted.

26. It is our present opinion that the Soviet Union will not initiate major military moves against the Western Powers until Soviet leadership feels reasonably confident of achieving certain definite results with respect to the United States. We believe that Soviet leadership probably now concludes:

- a. That they cannot yet reduce sufficiently the US capability to deliver atomic weapons on the Communist power base.
 - b. That they cannot yet sufficiently neutralize the US capability to sustain large-scale military operations of all types.
 - c. That they cannot yet sufficiently neutralize the US capability to develop and produce weapons which may prove of critical or decisive importance in war, and
 - d. That these results must be reasonably obtainable through some combination of effort, complex or simple, offensive or defensive, before any war plan which really exposes the Soviet homeland to counter-attack is sound and should be implemented.
27. We believe this is a reasonable view of probable Soviet strategic thinking, and as such it provides the West with a reasonably concrete area in which to seek indicators of the imminence of major Soviet military action within the next decade. It provides, also, an area for consideration of opportunities for deterrent effects through Western preparation and other actions. The timing of any peak danger point for general war during the next decade is, therefore, dependent upon what the West does or fails to do as much as upon what the Soviet Union may succeed in doing.

~~Approved For Release 2000/08/29 : CIA-RDP79S01011A000800040003-5~~

DOCUMENT DESCRIPTION	REGISTRY
SOURCE DI/USAF	CIA CONTROL NO. 5303
DOC. NO. 812-11	DATE DOCUMENT RECEIVED 11 Dec. 52
DOC. DATE 11 Dec. 52	LOGGED BY AN
COPY NO. 3	
NUMBER OF PAGES 11	
NUMBER OF ATTACHMENTS	

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